

February 22, 2023

EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

H.B. No. 6662: AA Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education

S.B. No. 1028: AA Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education

TESTIMONY from Greg. J. Florio, Ed.D., Executive Director of CREC

Honorable Chairs, Ranking Members, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am Dr. Greg Florio, Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). For 50+ years, CREC has worked with our 35 member Hartford area districts to provide cost-effective and high-quality educational programs and services. We also work together as an alliance with other Connecticut RESCs acting as a statewide network in the procurement of educational services.

I am requesting your support and advocacy for two important initiatives to the CREC region:

1. Equitable Education Funding Mechanism - Reduce the economic and racial funding disparities that exists in the current educational funding formula to help school districts and CREC mitigate the fiscal cliff with the phase out of COVID-relief funds by including the funding mechanism from HB 5003 in the Governor's Education Budget recommendation in HB 6662 to immediately support not only our Sheff & non-Sheff magnet schools, but districts across the state; and
2. Increasing Educator Diversity (IED) - Revise the well-intended mechanism enacted for increasing educator diversity within the 2022-23 biennial budget by eliminating the funding burden from Alliance districts and designating \$5.5 million dollars annually in a new budget line item under the Department of Education.

The state's base funding for Sheff-region magnet schools remains statutorily unchanged for over a decade with only a 2% increase in the per pupil magnet school grant in 2019. This provided short-term relief, but does not cover the full funding needed to sustain magnet schools since it only covers approximately 50% of our operating costs. HB 6662 does not provide the funding that our school districts need and our students deserve, but HB 5003 does provide the funding that is the most transformational attempt at creating an equitable funding formula for the state. It significantly cuts the \$700+ million economic and racial gaps in Connecticut education funding, which continues to limit opportunities for economically-disadvantaged students and students of color.

ECS increased by 12% from FY13-FY21 while the Sheff Magnet grant remained essentially flat since 2010. Even with the 2% grant increase in 2019, the differential between ECS growth & this flat funding amounts to \$79 million for our sending districts to cover over the last 10 years. Federal ESSR and ARPA funds allowed CREC to operate without an increase last year. However, this year, CREC increased tuition to districts by \$900 per student even with Federal ESSR and ARPA funds. Without an additional investment in the Sheff Magnet School Grant, CREC will be forced to continue increasing tuition rates to sending districts by an additional \$800 per student in 2023-24 and \$600 in 2024-25 for a total \$2,300 per student in three years. HB 5003 not only eliminates the need for CREC to charge tuition.

CREC Magnet Schools have made a significant effort to reduce expenditures through cuts to staff and programming and the magnet school programs have run deficits. Without this much needed student centered funding formula, a greater burden is placed on local towns as a result of tuition increases from RESC-operated magnet schools. Please advocate for and include the funding mechanism outlined in HB 5003 in HB 6662. This student centered funding formula not only fixes the current disjointed educational funding, but, most importantly, it also ensures students have access to the teachers, tutors, programming, mental health supports, and additional resources they need to be successful in the classroom and beyond.

For the 2020-21 school year, 9.7% of Connecticut's teacher workforce were of educators of color, while more than 47% of the state's students identified as people of color, according to the state Department of Education. Revising the funding mechanism enacted for IED Residency Programs by eliminating the funding burden from Alliance districts will allow for district across Connecticut to meet the needs of recruiting and retaining teachers of color for all students in CT public schools. The success of the [CT Teacher Residency Program](#) should be expanded upon with investment from the State. It is the only residency program in CT that requires districts to provide a living wage to residents and it has successfully added over 60 teachers of color in 25 districts since 2020. TRP also has a successful 100% retention rate with 100% residents teaching in classrooms and plans to launch Special Education certification this June. Please support funding in the State Department of Education budget by designating \$5.5 million annually in a new budget line item to support our educator workforce.

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For more information: [2023 CREC Legislative Priorities](#) and [RESC Alliance Legislative Priorities](#)